Zydeco and Brashness Can Make for a Good Time

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Zydeco and Brashness Can Make for a Good Time

by Azure_K_Mello

Summary

Will worries when his dad meets Beverly but Beverly is a rock star.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

His vacation was only getting better. The morning after the dinner party he called the Dean of the academy and told her about the guys at the airport. Then he washed his hands of it. It was no longer his problem but he got the feeling they'd be running the obstacle course four times a day and have lines to write. Then Abigail called and told him she wanted to work with JT. So, he, his dad and JT all went to meet her and Alana at the hospital. They ate outside in the garden as JT and Abigail hammered out a plan. It was sunny and Will stretched his legs out, making himself comfortable.

Will was in a bubble. They called an architect Alana liked and his dad called the lawyer who had bought Will's house to put in an offer on the land. The lawyer assured them it would go through before Will's dad left. Hannibal was working but other than the night before his early morning, and the night of his late appointments he came home for dinner and spent breakfast with them. Zydeco was playing from dawn to bed, lightly in the background, the new stuff his dad had brought him and all the old favorites.

It was at breakfast one morning that he said, "Mark this down, guys. This is my very last dose of head pills." His dad clapped and Hannibal chuckled as Will swallowed them with a sip of coffee.

Mostly, they sat around drinking coffee and playing with the dogs. They worked on the boat in the evenings and Hannibal laughed when he drove up and saw them both wear face masks, work gloves and goggle, sanding off the old paint. He smiled saying, "The English have a phrase for this, Richard, a busman's holiday. A bus driver's friend asks what he's doing with his vacation and he says he's going on a coach tour."

His dad pulled off his mask and cleared his throat, they'd been speaking in creole all day and he switched to English saying, "I like boats. I like that she's Will's even more. She's gonna be a really pretty boat when he's done with her."

Will wasn't wearing his glasses under his goggles. He didn't need his glasses, not really, they were protection. A physical barrier between him and the world. The magnification was so slight it made absolutely no difference. All it was, was a way to separate himself from the world around him. When it was just his dad and him it felt no different than being by himself.

It was great. The first morning they wanted to go fishing Will realized his extra waders were at Jack's lab. It was too cold to stand in the water and Will said he could just drive over and pick them up but his dad said, "No, I'd like a walk. You walk there every morning, honey. I've seen your classroom and your office. Can I please see your lab?"

Will couldn't find an excuse and said that it sounded good. When he dad went to get his coat he sent a text to Beverly, "Please do me a favor. I'm heading to the lab with my dad. Act like we're friends and try to get Jack the office?"

He didn't get a response and he hoped she would see it. His dad would worry if Zeller was being hostile and Jack tried to get him to work on his vacation. If he thought that Will had a friend in Beverly things would be easier. He was wearing cargo pants and sneakers but he didn't bother to change. He gave the dogs a brief speech, assuring them he'd be home soon

and they'd all go play by the water and asking them not to destroy anything in his absence. Beverly hadn't texted him back but he hoped that that she was her usual friendly self and his dad would mistake her friendliness for friendship. He didn't want his dad to worry until he actually needed to worry. He grabbed his coat, keys and wallet and he walked with his dad over the fields the same way he did every morning. His dad started to hum Les Filles a Nonc Helaire and Will sang along. They ended up laughing and singing together as they walked.

Inside, at security, he sobered up and gave them his ID and his dad's driver's license to sign him in as a guest. As he filled out the information needed to get his dad into the building he put on his glasses. It made him feel more comfortable.

He was relieved when he saw Beverly, maybe she'd gotten the message. She smiled at him brightly and said, "Did you get my psychic message?"

"No," he said slowly. Looking around he saw that there was no body on the slab and he said, "You're bored and you want a snack?"

"How is it that you know the massage when you didn't receive it?" asked Beverley with a smile.

"Beverly, this is my father, Richard. Daddy, this is my friend, Beverly."

"Richard," she said with a smile, "It's a pleasure to meet you." She pulled off her gloves and held out her hand, "I haven't been touching anything weird. I just put on gloves the minute I walk in."

His dad smiled, Will could tell he liked her from the way the skin around his eyes crinkled as he shook her hand. "It's a pleasure."

"What are you guys in for? Shouldn't you be at the monuments or something?" she asked.

"Remember that super gross crime scene where I ended up wearing the waders I had in the back of the car?"

"That was so gross," she nodded. "No one could tell what was evidence and what was just decay."

"Right. I left my waders here because they smelled. And now we're going fishing."

Beverly laughed, "Richard, can't you get him out of the water? Will, take your dad to the monuments."

"I love fishing with my boy," said his dad. "I've seen the monuments before. I haven't seen what we might be able to pull out of the water today."

"You're as bad as he is," said Beverly with an exaggerated sigh.

Will smiled and said, "I'll be right back. I left them in the airing room. You can't go in there, Daddy, we keep evidence in there to dry sometimes."

“I can keep your dad company,” Beverly offered. “Do you have baby pictures?”

“Thanks,” said Will. As his dad said, “Just one.”

It was just down the hall but as it was near the evidence locker he had to swipe his card at several doors. The waders were exactly where he’d left them and the smell had gone. He also had to swipe himself out. It didn’t take long at all but it took too long.

He heard Zeller before he got into the room as the man said, “Really? I kinda thought he was hatched.”

As he walked in his dad replied, “That’s interesting. I kinda think you’re an ass.”

Will wanted to break it up and he saw Beverly was holding his dad’s wallet open. Will saw the picture. It was him and his brothers, only days after they’d had their heads shaved. His brothers were all glaring but Will was beaming, uncaring for his brothers’ anger. His daddy had forgiven him so everything had been right in his world again. It was his dad’s favorite picture because it always made him laugh and because Will was actually looking at the camera. He grabbed the wallet and said, “Thanks for keeping my dad company, Beverly. Come on, Daddy, let’s see what will bite.” He guided his dad out by the arm. Hoping they would be fortunate enough to miss Jack.

He could tell his dad was pissed but he held his tongue until he’d gotten his driver’s license back and they were outside the building before he said, “What a dislikable man. He’s certainly not going to one of Hannibal’s dinner parties, ‘as long as he’s breathing’.” He was quoting Hannibal and that made Will smile.

“He doesn’t like me much. Partly because I’m awkward but partly because he used to be Jack’s go to guy.” Will took off his glasses and slid them back into his pocket.

“I don’t care why he doesn’t like you. He’s not allowed to be rude to you.”

Will shrugged. “I’m rude to everyone.”

“Well, he certainly shouldn’t have been rude about you to me.”

“Yeah,” agreed Will.

“What an ass,” his dad repeated. Then he said, “Beverly seems very nice.”

“She is,” agreed Will. They fell into silence as they walked. Will worried and said, “I honestly don’t care what he thinks of me, Daddy.”

“I just think you should work with people who like you, honey.”

“I have all the people I need in my life. I don’t need Zeller to like me. JT was right: I walk into a room, spot my people and stay by them. Zeller isn’t one of my people.”

“Mwen bay tèt li pwoblèm,” said his father softly. Such a simple admission. I worry. It was so simple and yet meant so much. His dad was always worried for him. Something as small

as a dislikable coworker set his teeth on edge because Will was too delicate.

“Mwen konnen,” he acknowledged. His dad frequently switched to creole when talking of difficult things. Will found them easier to talk about that way and so his dad embraced it.

His dad repeated, “Mwen bay tèt li pwoblèm.”

“Mwen byen,” Will said, trying to assure his dad of the truth. He was fine, right now he was fine. It was just that work with Jack, and — to a certain extent — Zeller, meant that there would come a time when he wasn’t.

His dad could see that, knew how to read situations almost as well as Will himself and asked, “Depi kombyin tan?” Because wasn’t that the question? How long would Will be able to cope?

He shrugged and said, “Pou tan ke nou kapab, Daddy.” And that was the answer: Will would be okay for a long as he could be. He would keep working until he just couldn’t. His dad took his hand and Will didn’t pull away. Sometimes his dad sought to comfort him as if he were a child. And, though Will wasn’t a child in any way but legally, sometimes it worked.

“I guess we’ll see what the dogs have been up to,” said his dad, letting go of the topic but not Will’s hand.

“Usually they’re pretty good. But having three people around to give them attention has made them hyper. I think when Abigail moves in they’ll get a little more used to a little excitement. But she’s a pretty calm girl. Her idea of a wild night is ding-dong-ditch, not a club.”

“I like her a lot. I want to make you cupcakes before I leave. Your birthday is in only a few weeks. I know Hannibal won’t be excited by rainbow cupcakes but do you think we could maybe bring them to share with Abigail? I don’t know how her hospital feels about groups of people and food. We’ve already done it once.” Will knew that Hannibal had been visiting her at lunch but he’d been staying away, letting her digest his dad. JT’s contract had come and Will had left his dad reading a book to go over it with her and Hannibal after Hannibal’s lawyer had looked it over.

“I think as long as things don’t get loud they don’t care. We aren’t throwing a party. It’s cupcakes. Rainbow cupcakes are great but they aren’t considered a party.”

Will had always loved cupcakes. Growing up he’d never really had clothes of his own or toys or his own, it was all passed down or communal. A cupcake is a whole cake that you got to yourself. There was no way for an older brother to steal the biggest bit or take the corner slice. He’d never grown out of finding that appealing. Nowadays he had money to burn, was the most successful of all of them and lived by himself but he still loved that cupcakes were a cake you didn’t have to share. And, as silly was it was, rainbow cupcakes still appealed to him. Vanilla was a perfectly nice flavor. But dye the batter and layer it and it became much more than a vanilla cupcake.

“I could make you brownies, or a real cake, if you’d rather.”

Will shook his head, “I like rainbow cupcakes.” They went inside where the dogs reacted like they’d been gone days instead of an hour and grabbed all their gear. They walked with the dogs marching along with them to the river. It was slow going because his dad had brought them new toys that they kept fetching and Will couldn’t not throw them. He was a little bit of a jerk not cruel.

It wasn’t too long before they reached the river, where they pulled on their waders and let the dogs play on the banks as they climbed in. This time the silence between them as easy and Will was happy. His cellphone buzzed with a message. Just a quick “Hello, where are you?” from Hannibal. Will texted back and refocused on his task.

When Hannibal arrived he was in a much more relaxed suit than usual and he sat down on the banks, “Any luck?” he asked by way of greeting.

“Check the basket,” Will nodded to it and Hannibal opened the lid to see the two large trout inside.

“Very nice,” he observed.

“We’re aiming for one more,” said his dad, “if we don’t get it we’ll have trout soup but if we do I think we should barbeque it. It’s a pretty evening.”

“It is, would be a great night for nocturnal hunting,” Hannibal said with a nod, “but the company offered here was far too good for me to consider it.”

He opened his briefcase and Will said, “Do you have a lot of transcribing tonight?”

“No, only one patient. I had a two hour break between appointments and managed to get most of them finished. I know that fishing is a quiet sport so now seems as good a time as any.” He got his iPad and began typing. “How was your day?”

“We played with the dogs and drank coffee in our PJs for much too long this morning,” said his dad. “That was nice. And then we went over to Will’s lab where I made the unfortunate acquaintance of a jerk. What was his name, boy?”

“It was Zeller.”

“Hm,” Hannibal agreed. “If it wasn’t for how good an agent he is, and how important his work with the FBI is I would say that man didn’t deserve the air in his lungs and the world would be a better place without him. Sadly, he does do good work. He also distracts Jack from Will. As such, I feel he should be spared his life, but I’d be quite pleased if he bought a series of lemon cars.”

Will laughed and said, “That seems like a fitting punishment.” Hannibal gave him a tiny smile, amused at the exchange.

“But that girl, Beverly? What a sweet girl. She was a pleasure.”

“I’ve always like Ms. Katz. She has a mind like a diamond and she’s quite funny. Did you meet Jack Crawford or Jimmy Price?”

“No, they weren’t there. It might be a good thing with Jack; I’d have given him a piece of my mind. I called Zeller an ass to his face.”

Hannibal sniffed, not looking up from his iPad, “That is not inaccurate. I quite like Mr. Price. Interesting man.”

“Do you like him?” asked his dad turning to Will.

Will shrugged, “I don’t dislike him.” Something bit his line and he reeled it in, fighting it to tire it out. His dad grabbed the net for him as Will lifted it out. It was another nice trout and Will said, “Barbeque it is.” The fish was still fighting in his net and Will said, “This would be a lot easier for you if you just gave up.”

“That’s what I always say to things I kill to eat,” said Hannibal with a note of surprise as he brought the basket to the water’s edge. The fish only struggled for a few moments more and was clearly in his last minutes before Will hit its head on a rock. It was better that way, faster, only painful for a brief moment instead of minutes of agony trying to breathe the thin air through gills. He and his dad made their way out of the river and pulled off the waders as Hannibal put away his folder and iPad. Will got a clean knife and cleaned the fish there. It let the dogs eat what they wanted of the entrails without his needing to clean up after them. Once Will put the filleted fish back Hannibal took basket as Will and his dad were both laden with the accoutrements of their sport.

The dogs were faster going home than they were going toward the river because now they were ready for supper. Instead of bringing Will their toys they carried them in their mouths. Will looked at them. They each had a toy and he said, “You really spoil my boys, Daddy. They’d be pleased for your company without the gifts.”

“It’s such a small thing to do, Will, they like it.”

They dumped their waders and fishing rods by the kitchen door. And washed their hands and faces at the kitchen sink. Hannibal put the basket on the table and said, “Abigail had her first Skype appointment with JT today. I only saw her briefly, she had group therapy. She seemed fine but you may want to call her.”

“I should change out of these damp clothes,” said Will. “I’ll call her from the bedroom.” As he passed Hannibal he kissed him gently, “Glad you’re home.”

“I had a good day but I kept watching the clock,” admitted Hannibal.

Will smiled, “Anything nice happen?”

“No, but no blow ups, either. No one threw anything at me. Some of my patients had good news. No one had terrible news and I saw Abigail if only for a couple of minutes. It was a good day. But I knew you were here, doing fun things without me and it made me watch the clock.”

“Would you have wanted to go fishing?”

“I don’t think waders are flattering,” said Hannibal with a shake of his head. “But I would have gladly sat on the shore watching you.” He kissed Will, slowly, and pulling back he said, “Go change and I’ll get the barbeque burning.”

His dad followed him, going to change himself and in the living room he whispered, “You’re perfect together,” which made Will laugh. In the bedroom he striped and redressed in dry clothes and he sat down on the bed to call Abigail. A nurse answered and went to fetch Abigail and the door creaked open and Winston came to him, putting his front paws on Will’s legs to nuzzle his face. Charlie came in behind and slowly but surely all seven of his dogs came into the room and settled by his feet and on the floor. When Abigail came to the phone he could tell just from her voice that she was in a good mood.

“Hannibal said you had your first chat with JT. I just wanted to check in.”

“He was right when he told me to keep my people close. I set up my Skype date with him to be before my appointment with Dr. Bloom and I was a mess by the end of it. We were talking about Marissa. I miss her so much. And sometimes I’m not sure if I’m allowed to. She got killed because of my father. I don’t know if I’m allowed to miss her when she died because he was killing people who looked like me.” She took a deep breath. “We just talked about my best friend. He told me I didn’t need to start from the beginning, that we’ll talk so much order doesn’t matter. And it was good to talk about her, to let myself miss her and be happy thinking about her. But I was a mess by the end and glad Dr. Bloom came. We talked more, about guilt, mostly. And now, I feel a little lighter. I miss my best friend but that’s okay.”

“I’m glad you feel a little lighter and that you aren’t regretting talking to JT.”

“No, I liked talking to him. He’s nice.”

“Good.”

He heard someone in the background and she said, “I have to go, it’s dinner time.”

“Okay, Abigail, you can call me anytime, check in with me anytime. If you want to talk I’m a phone call away. If you want to sit together, it’s not a long drive.”

“Thank you, Will.”

“For what?”

“A lot of people would have shot my dad, saved my life and moved on. You’re renovating a room and calling just to check in. You’re a good person.”

“Older brothers should do more than just get between you and drunk guys,” Will told her gently. “Daddy’s gonna bake some cupcakes for my birthday because he won’t be here for the actual day. Would you like it if we came and shared them? Did you like hanging out with him?”

“Yeah, I did. And I would love a cupcake.”

“Okay, then I’ll see you soon but don’t hesitate to call if you want to talk. Have a good night, Abigail.”

“You too, Will.”

As he hung up his phone made the beeping noise it made to alert him to an unread text. He must have missed one at some point and skipped over it when Hannibal texted him. It was a simple message from Beverly Katz, “Zeller wasn’t the only ass in the lab today.”

He felt himself go cold. He should have known it had gone too well and he wondered how he’d upset her. Retracing the events he tried to find a misstep but he thought he’d been okay. He looked at his phone, scared of having upset someone he liked. He was afraid to call her because she might shout and he was living in his bubble without shouting. Hannibal came in saying, “There are some matches in the bedside table.” Then he saw Will’s face, “What’s wrong?”

He held the phone out to Hannibal and, as the other man took it, he said, “I would text an apology but I don’t know what I did so to apologize correctly I have to call her… but she may shout.”

Hannibal stroked his cheek as he sat down and handed the phone back, “You’re correct, of course, I’ll sit here with you.”

Will smiled, “Thank you.” He put on his glasses before he went through the address book in his phone and hit send. Hannibal took his free hand and gently stroked Will’s knuckles with his thumb.

Beverly picked up saying, “You’re a jerk, Will Graham.”

He exhaled slowly as he said, “I’m sorry you’re upset. But I don’t know what I’ve done.”

“Asking me to act like we’re friends,” she sounds more irritated than angry.

“I’m sorry that I asked you to do it. And that I gave you such little notice. You did a really good job. He worries, you see, I wanted him to feel more comfortable”

“I didn’t even see your text until after you left the lab.”

“Oh.”

“Do you know how many people are allowed to eat my emergency Doritos? Or how many people I go out of my way to bring coffee to while trying to engage them in interest conversations about Willard Wigan?”

“Who is Willard Wigan?” he asked and she sighed.

“Or how many people I stay at the lab until the wee hours of the morning to offer a ride to because there’s snow?”

“Not many?” he guessed.

“Not many,” she agreed, “and to be informed by a text that you don’t think we’re friends is kinda of hurtful.”

“I’ve never had many friends. People don’t like me. I’m weird. I like you I just didn’t think you liked me all that much.”

“You’re not weird, Will, you’re downright peculiar. I still like you. I still avoid work by getting fast food with you. We’re friends.”

“I’m glad… that means I have five friends which is more than I’ve ever had before.”

She sighed again, “I take it back; you’re not a jerk you’re a moron.”

He thought for a moment, weighed his choices, and finally said, “Do you want to come over for dinner? My dad and I caught three big trout. Hannibal’s here. We’re going to barbeque them.”

“You don’t like people in your space,” she reminded him.

“I didn’t think you liked me that much. I don’t like anyone in my space who isn’t my friend. I don’t like people seeing my possessions and judging them when I don’t know how they feel about me. You can be in my space.”

“Okay,” she said, “What time?”

“Whenever you like; we’re just getting the barbeque going now.”

“I was just about to leave the lab. Do you want me to grab anything? Beer or something?”

“We have beer and we don’t need anything.”

“Okay. I’ll see you in ten minutes.”

“Sounds good,” he agreed. As he hung up he said, “She was angry because she assumed I knew we were friends.”

Hannibal kissed the edge of his mouth. “I’ve always liked Ms. Katz.”

“Me too,” agreed Will. “I better make some salads. The fish will stretch. Three big fish will stretch.” He stood and realized he was still holding Hannibal’s hand. “Thank you.”

“For what?” asked Hannibal.

“For sitting with me.”

“I will always sit with you. There is, quite literally, nowhere else I would rather be than sitting with you.” He stood and kissed Will slowly. “Nowhere.”

Will smiled and then said, “Come on, we need to get the barbeque burning.” Hannibal picked up the matches and still held Will’s hand as they left the room.

In the kitchen his dad was making a marinade for the fish. “I’ll go light the barbeque,” said Hannibal, releasing Will’s hand and going to the door, Calvin on his heels.

“Beverly is coming for dinner so I’m going to make salads,” he said. “Our friendship is pretty new. I liked her but I only recently found out that she liked me… she’s never been to the house before. She’s driven up to the mailbox but she’s not been here.”

“You like your space.”

“It’s easier when you’re here. I’m not as afraid when you’re here. It’ll be good to have her over for the first time while you’re here.”

“Good,” said his dad. He finished with the marinade and put the fish in the bowl to soak. “You’re wearing your glasses, boy, you okay?”

Will took the glasses off, “They make me feel safe.” He got the corn for the grill and started to pull things out to make pasta salad, a chunky salsa and some coleslaw.

“Put your glasses back on, honey. They make you feel better. Your friend is coming over for the first time and that’s scary.”

Will did as he was told and said, “Thank you, Daddy.” He looked around and went to the door. Opening it he called, “Hannibal, will you eat cornbread from a box or is that just too disgusting?”

Hannibal laughed, really laughed. It was a happy noise. The man rarely did more than chuckle but clearly that had struck a chord in him. He came to the back porch and kissed him slowly before saying, “I will take a look at the ingredients.” He passed by Will and went into the kitchen. As he read the box he gently ran his knuckles up and down Will’s spine. Will relaxed into the touch, enjoying the intimacy as his dad was starting to get the corn ready. “All this is, is a box of the ingredients one would need to make cornbread; no odd preservatives.”

Will smiled, “Good. Y’know, you’re the pickiest eater I’ve ever met over the age of five.” He got out mixing bowls and chopping boards as Hannibal got knives and started to wash the vegetables.

“When I used to climb up the castle wall too high my mother would call out, ‘It took me nine months to make that body. Don’t break it in nine seconds.’ It took her nine months to make this body: I’m not going to break it with harmful chemicals that mass produced food frequently contains… the castle walls never seemed that high until Mischa started to try and climb them and suddenly it seemed like the deadliest game I had ever thought of up until that point.”

His dad chuckled, “Have you thought of a deadlier one since?”

Hannibal nodded, “A game called surgery. It’s a team game. One player lays down on an operating table the other tries to cut things out of them. Sometimes everyone wins and one player gets to go home fixed and the other one feeling like they’ve achieved something.

Other times, one is dead and the other becomes a psychiatrist to avoid ever accidentally killing someone again. I played that game for years. I was pretty good at that game. But after I lost my tenth playmate on the table I was done. You know, as a doctor, that you can't save everyone; diseases and illnesses sometimes win. But as a surgeon your losses are much more active. They died under a knife I was yielding when all I was trying to do was win for both of us. I decided never to kill anyone with medicine ever again. I remember their faces, my accidental victims. So now I'm a psychiatrist. My wins are never quite so lofty as they were before but my losses are much less catastrophic." Will chuckled, "What's so funny about that?"

"You have a scar on your forehead from the latest loss," Will said, then kissed the place where only two days before Hannibal had had his stitches removed.

Hannibal nodded, "I'm being sued. Being sued is so much nicer than having to tell a spouse you lost their partner on the table."

Sobering quickly Will said, "He's suing?"

Hannibal nodded, "I'm at fault; I've already apologized and told my lawyer to settle. This is why I have malpractice insurance. This is the first time I've used it since I became a psychiatrist. My lawyer is very angry that I apologized and admitted fault but only a coward wouldn't apologize to later claim they were not at fault. He had to take time off work and an overnight stay in the ER isn't cheap. I have insurance for exactly this reason."

It clicked in Will's head, "You told him to sue. You apologized, admitted culpability, told him you were at fault, told him you had insurance that would fix the financial burden and told him to sue."

Hannibal studied him and gave him one of his micro smiles, "If my lawyer asks, that is not what happened." He shook his head, "I medicated him so poorly that he had a breakdown in my office and threw everything at me. I had to sedate the poor man who had done nothing but taken the pills I had prescribed. He was willing to accept my apology. I didn't tell him to sue; I persuaded him to do so. He was worried that if he sued I wouldn't keep him as a patient or that it would damage our relationship. I assured him that nothing would change between us but that I would want a second opinion on his meds and regular blood tests to check his medication levels. I made a very costly mistake, all he did was follow doctor's orders."

Will chuckled, "You're a wonderful man, Hannibal, you're always improving your corner of the world."

"The thing I learned from the life I've led is that no one will do it for me. I want my corner to be pleasant so I work to make it that way." He looked at all the vegetables he was washing. "Are you not making potato salad?"

"I wasn't planning on it. Do you want me too?" He asked as he put the cornbread

"If I were on death row I would want that potato salad as part of my last meal."

"What a gruesome and ghoulish thought," said his dad.

Will just smiled as he started to get the things for a potato salad. “I’ll make potato salad; please don’t end up on death row. Too many people in my family have spouses, partners or are themselves in prison. I’d like to break that pattern.”

“So you’re saying that I’m not allowed to get caught while brutally murdering people?” asked Hannibal with a smirk.

“Exactly.”

“What am I doing with these vegetables?” asked Hannibal.

Will told him what he wanted and then said, “I have something to ask you but it may be very rude. I don’t know.”

Hannibal shook his head, “It’s not rude when it’s wholly unintentional and guileless.” His father moved to help Hannibal with the other salads and Hannibal moved down the counter a bit to give him room.

“I admire that Beverly is herself at the top of her lungs. It scares me to be myself in front of others. Because people who don’t like me can be mean or manipulative. She doesn’t care what people think. She genuinely doesn’t give a damn. I think that is a remarkable, estimable quality. But I don’t know what that means as far as discretion goes.”

Hannibal nodded. “I’ll do my utmost to keep my hands to myself.”

“It’s not that I’m embarrassed or want to keep our relationship a secret,” Will started to explain.

“It’s that Jack Crawford has already made some disparaging remarks about our relationship and I don’t want to hear any from Zeller.” Hannibal put down the knife he was using to cut a tomato and crossed the room to where Will was setting up a frying pan to cook bacon and Hannibal physically turned him away from the stove to kiss him, slowly. “I would never think that you were ashamed of our relationship because it would never occur to you. You simply try to avoid meanness.”

“Exactly,” Will smiled again his lips.

There was a knock at the door and Hannibal gave him a peck before saying, “That will be the last kiss for the rest of the evening.”

“We’ll be talking about Jack’s comments later,” said his dad, “I don’t like you working for this man.”

Will nodded and turned to go to the front door. Winston followed him, always eager to stay close. He smiled at Beverly as he opened the door, “Hi, come in,” He stepped back for her.

“Are you sure?” she asked.

“Yes,” he nodded. “I hope you like dogs.”

She looked at Winston and smiled, “I love dogs, the only reason I don’t have one is because of my lease.”

“Oh good,” he said as she stepped inside the dogs had left the kitchen to see what Will was up to and they all came to sniff Beverly.

“Wow, Will, I knew you had dogs I didn’t know you had a pack.”

“Yes, I have a pack. They’re good boys.” He ran through introductions and Beverly just nodded. As he took her coat he said, “Come on into the kitchen.”

“Something smells amazing,” she said and he laughed.

“That’s just the smell of frying bacon… I hope Hannibal took over that job, I forgot and came to the door.”

“I did,” said Hannibal, smiling at him as they came into the kitchen and shaking the pan, “don’t worry.” He smiled at Beverly and said, “Ms. Katz, we’ve never met socially and only ever briefly interacted through the FBI. And so, while it may be overly formal and very European of me, I’d like to introduce myself as Hannibal.”

“Hannibal, please call me Beverly. No one ever calls me Ms. Katz unless I’m giving evidence on the witness stand.”

Will liked the interaction, however superficial it was. He liked when people he liked were nice to each other. “Where’d Daddy go?” he asked Hannibal.

“To check the grill. I estimate ten more minutes before it’s ready but your father wanted to be sure. It was ready for the corn but not the meat.”

His dad came in and said, “Ten more minutes and we’ll be good. I put the corn on.”

Hannibal winked at Will and Will smiled more widely. “Beverly, would you like a drink?” He listed off everything and she decided on a beer. As he retrieved a bottle from the fridge, he asked, “Would anyone like a burger as well? Hannibal, I watched the butcher grind it. It’s organic and there’s no pink slime.”

Hannibal studied him for a moment, “You’re bad at making friends but you’re astonishingly good at being a friend.”

“I try really, really hard,” said Will honestly. “I’m aware of my inadequacies and make up for it very consciously.”

“You’re not inadequate; you’re just really peculiar,” said Beverly. “I’ve never thought you were lacking, just odd as hell.”

Will chuckled, “That’s why you’re one of my friends. Do you think Zeller thinks I’m anything but inadequate?”

“Zee thinks everyone is derisory when compared to him. That’s why he doesn’t get to eat my emergency Doritos,” she replied. “I would like a supplementary burger.”

Everyone quickly requested a burger and Hannibal said, “May I contribute by making them? I have a strange knack for them.”

“I loved the burger you made while I was sick,” said Will.

“You were hallucinating and running a frightening fever,” Hannibal pointed out.

Will nodded, “Which shows how good the burger was that I remember it.”

Hannibal laughed and Will’s dad said, “May I ask what ‘emergency Doritos’ are or is that a euphemism?”

“I keep snacks in my car for emergencies. They’re for my use and my use alone but if Will’s been dragged out half way through the opera, is wearing a suit and was supposed to go to dinner afterwards, he can eat them… we also went out for secret Burger King and claimed my car needed Will to fix it.”

That reminded Will and he asked, “Did you get your axel realigned?”

“Yes, it was exactly what you said. It’s not the least bit juddery now.”

“Good,” Will said. “Jack really needs to stop pulling me in when I’m having a good night but the chips and Burger King did help ease the wound.”

His dad shook his head, “Jack needs stop pulling you in, period.”

“I’ll quit when it becomes detrimental instead of distressing,” Will promised. He finished the potato salad and put it aside to pick up the coleslaw where Hannibal had left off.

“May I help?” asked Beverly.

“Can you cook?” asked Will.

“No, not at all,” she shook her head. “Burger King is not an abnormal dinner for me.”

“Then why don’t you just be good company?” said his dad.

“That’s pressure,” she said with a laugh. Winston butted against her, enjoying the noise. “Will, when you told me you had dogs I was not expecting seven.”

He nodded and said, “Few people do. Wasn’t it a nice surprise?”

“They’re pretty boys.”

He nodded again. They worked quickly and his dad showed the bowl of marinating fish to Beverly, “And you thought we should see the monuments.”

“Clearly, I was wrong,” She agreed.

“We have that nice bread I baked that we could use in place of buns,” suggested Hannibal.

“We also have hamburger buns,” said Will. “I always like them because they’re built for their job.”

His dad studied him and said, “Will’s being diplomatic. When he was little I couldn’t afford hamburger buns. A loaf of bread is much, much cheaper than buns. All the burgers he ate as a kid were served on bread.”

“Buns are more correct,” Will said.

Hannibal said, “These burgers are ready for the grill and the grill should be ready for them. Is the fish ready?”

“The fish could use a couple more minutes,” said his dad.

Hannibal nodded and started to gather up cooking utensils and then said, “I’m sorry, Richard, you intended on barbequing and here I am taking over.”

“I didn’t mind,” his dad assured Hannibal.

“The patriarch should always man the grill,” Hannibal said.

His dad accepted the plate of burgers that Hannibal handed over as though they were an award. His dad asked how cooked everyone wanted their burgers and then said, “Hannibal, would you please keep me company?”

“I’d love to get away from the Zydeco for a while,” said Hannibal but he smiled at Will as he spoke. He carried out cooking utensils and said, “Buster, sit. You can’t come with us. There’s a very hot grill that you could, conceivably, knock onto yourself. Stay.” The dog sat but made a whining noise, clearly intending on following them the minute Hannibal looked away.

“Buster,” said Will. The dog kept making the begging noise and looking at Hannibal. Will made the noise he always made when he wanted their attention, “Tss-tss!” All the dogs looked at him and he said, “Buster, have you met Beverly? Why don’t you let her stroke you?” He pointed at Beverly and the dog crossed to her. “There you go, Beverly, now you have a job.” She crouched to stroke him as Hannibal and Will’s dad went out the door. The other dogs went to Beverly to seek her attention too.

She smiled and stroked them, “Pretty boys.”

“I always think so,” agreed Will. He pulled the cornbread from the oven while the dogs were distracted by her and away from the hot door. The CD ended and Will said, “I’m putting on another one before Hannibal comes in and sighs sadly.”

Beverly laughed, “It’s weird music.”

“To me it just sounds like home,” Will shrugged. “These are new ones, my dad brought them for me. I love them.” He danced as he finished the pasta salad.

“You have a beautiful house, Will,” said Beverly looking up from the dogs. “With the way you dress, unassuming and plainly, I expected it to be plain inside but it’s a beautiful house with beautiful dogs.”

Will felt himself smile at the praise. “It’s my haven from the world. When I was little we moved so much I didn’t have many personal belongings, just enough to throw in a bag. When I bought this place I filled it with nice stuff, nice dogs.”

The four of them had a pleasant dinner, with more than enough food and good company. And when Will was packing up left over for Beverly she said, “When I’m eating this tomorrow for lunch and Zeller sees it and asks what it is, I’m telling me I had a delicious dinner with you and that you’re a fantastic cook and that he can’t have any. I’ll let Jimmy have a bite, mostly because he raves the minute anything is tasty and that will just make Zeller more jealous.”

Will laughed, “Thanks, Beverly. I’m really glad you came over. We have to do this more. It’s nice to spend time together outside of the lab.” He smiles as he handed her the Tupperware. “I’ll walk you out.”

“Okay, Hannibal, are you heading out?” she asked, innocently.

And Hannibal just shook his head, “I find taking the dogs for one last walk of the night to be very soothing.”

“Okay, well, good night. It was a pleasure.” She smiled at everyone before Will walked her out. By her car she reached to pat Will’s arm and he couldn’t help the instinct to shy away.

“Sorry I,” he started to say but she shook her head.

“No, I should have thought,” she paused. “Will, can I ask you a rude question?”

“Too many mirror neurons,” he said, not forcing her to ask the obvious question. “I understand people too much. It puts me into a nigh on continual state of fear and stress, makes me agitated and jumpy. I don’t like physical contact because it’s too loud in my head, even without that added sensory input. You should see an fMRI of my brain. It’s more like art than biology.”

“So being the exact opposite of autistic kind of makes you autistic?” she asked gently.

“That’s it exactly,” he agreed. “I have a really hard time connecting with people because I read them too well. The only way to not over-see is to ignore everything possible.”

She nodded, “You’re a great person, Will. And a great cook. I thought of you as a friend long before today.”

He smiled at that, “Thank you. My friend JT says I can spot the nice people in a room. I’m glad you’re in the lab with me.”

“Jimmy is pretty great,” she said, “you should give him a chance.”

“He’s a little loud for me,” Will explained, “a little too excited about the gore. That scares me.”

She nodded and said, “Well, I certainly won’t force it but if you want six friends instead of five consider giving him a chance.” She climbed into her truck and said, “And your dad is totally awesome.”

“I agree,” said Will, “I can’t wait for him to move up here.” He gently hit the side of the truck and said, “Thank you for being my friend; get home safe.”

She waved out the window as she pulled down the drive and he raised his hand in response. Watching her pull out at the end of the road made him smile: he had five friends.

End Notes

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